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ABSTRACT

A study conducted with 17 experimental and 17 control kindergarten classes of Mexican-American, Black, and Other White children of varied academic achievement socio-economic background attempted to determine whether training in pre-reading skills would improve test scores in beginning reading. While children in the control groups experienced the regular kindergarten curriculum, experimental groups followed a course of study designed in a sequential, developmental order to teach the following skills: (1) listening for comprehension of content; (2) listening for auditory discrimination; (3) visual discrimination skills; (4) oral language skills; (5) motor-perceptual skills; and (6) sound-symbol correspondence skills. Materials used in the experimental course included detailed teacher reading readiness manuals, picture cards, flannelboards, hand puppets, and specially selected children's books. Tests administered at the end of the kindergarten school year, and again after a year of a regular first grade curriculum, discovered a significant improvement for all experimental groups over all control groups in reading ability, with differentiated scores for different ethnic groups, but undifferentiated scores for boys and girls in the experimental groups. (Statistical tables of test scores are included.) (MF)

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SUCCESS IN FIRST-GRADE READING

INTRODUCTION

A study was conducted in seventeen Los Angeles elementary schools to determine whether training in pre-reading skills would improve the reading test scores achieved in beginning reading by first-grade children. Results indicate that the experimental groups achieved significantly higher scores than the control groups, both at the end of the kindergarten school year and at the end of the first-grade, even though both groups were subject only to the regular first-grade curriculum after leaving the kindergarten. There were variations in the degree of improvement between the ethnic groups studied, but all experimental ethnic groups outscored the best control ethnic group. Of interest, also, was the fact that the final scores of the experimental groups showed no significant differences in the reading ability of the sexes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEGINNING READING

Educators, administrators, and all others concerned with reading skills must meet their responsibility to communicate whatever knowledge they possess, so that literacy can be established in our schools and developed in our children. Recent studies in teaching reading show that success in beginning reading is crucial,and that reading programs in the primary grades must be organized to assure this success. The large number of research studies designed to find more effective ways of teaching beginning reading give evidence of the importance

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of achievement in initial reading instruction.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

Over the past seven years, approximately 600 first-grade children of varying ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds have participated yearly in the author's research in the Los Angeles City Schools. The purpose of the research has been to study the relative effectiveness of a variety of methods and materials for teaching beginning reading. Through these studies it has become apparent that there are certain pre-reading skills necessary for children to succeed in reading.

With this knowledge, as well as that from other reading readiness studies, a research design was developed to teach in a sequential, developmental order, the following skills: 1) listening for comprehension of content; 2) listening for auditory discrimination; 3) visual discrimination skills; 4) oral language skills; 5) motor-perceptual skills; and 6) sound-symbol correspondence skills.

The research teachers were able to teach specific lessons in each of the six areas to small groups of children through grouping and independent activities. The skills objectives of each lesson were developed in detail in the teacher's manual. These skills were taught and retaught with sufficient practice periods, until an adequate level of proficiency was attained by the children. The objective of this program was to determine whether children taught pre-reading skills in a structured program would attain significantly higher scores on a standardized test of reading readiness skills than those children who had not been involved in such a program.

The implementation of this program covered seventeen schools, providing a cross-section of socio-economic levels representing ethnic categories of Mexican-American, Black and Other White children. Each experimental school was matched with a control school of similar ethnic origins, academic achieve-

ments and socio-economic backgrounds.

MATERIALS FOR THE PROGRAM

Each teacher in the experimental program used comprehensive reading-readiness manuals which contained specific, concrete suggestions in lesson-plan form to develop speech sounds and listening skills in a structured program which would evoke specific behavioral responses in the children. The materials included picture cards, large and small flannelboards, cut outs, pocket charts, chalkboards, hand puppets, phoneme boxes containing small objects, and books which were chosen primarily because of their universal appeal to four, five and six year olds.

RESULTS OF THIS PROGRAM

The Murphy-Durrell Reading Readiness Analysis was given to the seventeen experimental classes and the seventeen control classes at the end of the kindergarten school year. It was found that: 1) the experimental groups achieved significantly higher scores than the control groups; 2) the girls, as a group, achieved significantly better than the boys in the study; and 3) the Other White group achieved significantly higher scores than the Mexican-American groups and the Black groups. It should be pointed out, however, that the experimental Mexican-American and Black groups achieved considerably higher scores than the control group of Other Whites.

In summary, it may be said that the children in the kindergarten who were being taught in a structured sequential program with appropriate materials achieved significantly better scores than the children in the regular kindergarten curriculum.

SUBSEQUENT TESTING

In order to determine the long-range effectiveness of the kindergarten pre-reading experimental program, a post test was given to the same experimental

and control groups one year after the initial post test, that is, at the end of their first-grade year. During that year, the children who had been in both experimental and control group were involved in a regular first-grade curriculum utilizing California State reading texts. There were no special conditions for either experimental or control group children during the first-grade year. As the tables indicate, after an additional year, the original research program significantly improved the reading achievement of the experimental group.

TABLE I

Analysis of Variance of Post-Test Reading Scores:
The Main Effect Being Sex, Race and Experimental Condition

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	D.F.	Mean Square	F
Sex	0.02053	1	0.02053	0.04073
Race	89.01277	2	44.50638	88.30060*
Experimental	11.69933	1	11.69933	23.21144*
Sex X Race	1.06009	2	0.53005	1.05161
Sex X Experimental	0.08329	1	0.08329	0.16525
Race X Experimental	7.50888	2	3.75444	7.44880*
Sex X Race X Experimental	1.67277	2	0.83639	1.65939*

* Significant beyond the .01 level of confidence.

Table I shows that the main effects of race and experimental condition are both significant beyond the .01 level of confidence. For race an F of 88.30 was obtained with 2-1,000 degrees of freedom. An F of 4.62 is all that is required for the .01 level of confidence. For experimental condition an F of 23.21 was obtained with 1-1,000 degrees of freedom. An F of 6.66 is all that is required.

The remaining main effect of sex was not significant (F=.04). This lack of significance of the difference in reading scores between boys and girls is perhaps as important a finding as those reported above. Everyone familiar with reading test scores should be surprised that the girls did not significantly outscore the boys as in many classroom and testing situations. In fact, experimental conditions were successful in significantly raising the boys' test scores.

The interaction between race and the experimental condition was also significant (F=7.45)

Table II below shows the mean and number in each group by main effect and interaction. It appears that though all the races were helped by the experimental condition, the Other White group was helped the most, the Black group next most, and the Mexican-American group was helped the least.

TABLE II

Means and Numbers for Main Effects
of Sex, Race and Experimental Condition

		Number	Mean
Sex	Boys	612	20.9
	Girls	564	21.4
Race	Black	176	21.3
	Other White	556	23.7
	Mexican-American	444	17.7
Experimental	Experimental	588	22.4
	Control	588	19.8

It is surprising that there is no significant difference and little actual difference in the sexes (20.9 and 21.4). The means for the races (21.3, 23.7

and 17.7) would indicate that each race is significantly different from each other. In other words, the Other White group is significantly higher than the remaining races, and the Mexican-American group was significantly lower. The means for the experimental condition are 22.4 and 19.8. This difference though it appears small, is significant with those students having learned under the experimental conditions, outscoring those that were denied these teaching methods.

TABLE III

Means for Total Scores
on Cooperative Primary Test Used in the California Testing Program

	Black	Mexican-American	Other White
Boys	21.6	17.8	23.2
Girls	21.0	17.7	24.2
Total	21.3	17.7	23.7

	Black	Mexican-American	Other White
Experimental	22.1	18.2	25.9
Control	20.6	17.3	21.6
Total	21.3	17.7	23.7

	Boys	Girls	Total
Experimental	22.3	22.5	22.4
Control	19.4	20.2	19.8
Total	20.9	21.4	21.1

Table III gives the means for each race, broken down by experimental and control groups, and shows that for each race the experimental conditions im-

proved the measured reading ability. The difference for the Black group is 22.1 and 20.6. For the Other White group it is 25.9 and 21.6. For the Mexican-American group it is 18.2 and 17.3. It is interesting to note that the Black group outscored the Other White control group.

To summarize, these findings demonstrate the following: 1) the experimental condition significantly improved the reading ability of all the groups; 2) there were no significant differences in the reading achievement of the boys and the girls; 3) though the experimental methods improved the scores of all groups, they differentially improved the scores of childrem of different ethnic backgrounds. The Other White group improved most, the Black group next most, while the Mexican-American group showed least improvement. However, it must be remembered that the Black and the Mexican-American children in the experimental group achieved significantly higher scores than those of the Other White control groups.

The achievement noted here is a tribute to open-minded staffs who were willing to try different materials and methods in a program of structured and sequential pre-reading skills.